



# Board of Visitors Annual Report

National Fire Academy

*Fiscal Year 2005*



Homeland  
Security

## **Fiscal Year 2005 Meeting Schedule:**

February 1, 2005 • April 5-6, 2005

July 12-13, 2005

The National Fire Academy (NFA) Board of Visitors (BOV) reviewed the NFA in three areas of responsibility and submits the following report.

### **An examination of Academy programs to determine whether these programs further the basic missions approved by the Under Secretary of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Homeland Security.**

The NFA is a mission-driven organizational unit of the United States Fire Administration (USFA) and is positioned to support the accomplishment of the strategic goals of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The NFA offers a comprehensive curriculum of courses designed to ensure the preparedness of our Nation's first responders. These courses are delivered through a highly effective and efficient training system, wherein traditional training delivery has been supplemented with contemporary educational methodologies to respond to the training needs of our Nation's first responders more fully.

Resident courses are delivered on the campus of the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Additionally, courses are offered through regional deliveries, local deliveries, and distance education. The foundation of the off-campus course deliveries is the State and metropolitan fire department training systems. All NFA courses that realistically can be handed off to the States and metropolitan fire departments for local delivery have been.

The NFA continues to provide the necessary coordination of this extended training delivery system through the Training Resources and Data Exchange (TRADE) program and its support of the Prevention Advocacy Resources and Data Exchange (PARADE) network.

The NFA has successfully planned and implemented a number of distance education programs designed to respond to student needs and to further leverage available training resources. The BOV commends the NFA staff for its planned "blended learning" initiative, wherein the resident requirements of certain courses may be reduced through a coordinated delivery strategy of resident instruction at the NETC and distance education.

Where appropriate, courses are being converted to Web-based, thus allowing the NFA to use the vast capabilities of the Internet for delivery. The conversion of the Distance

Delivery Program (DDP) courses to Web-based is further enhancing the NFA's ability to work with colleges and universities.

Over the past 5 years the NFA has brought together stakeholders from across the Nation to develop a higher education delivery system for fire training designed to meet the needs of present and future first responders. These Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE) conferences have resulted in a realistic plan that is now being implemented, wherein traditional fire training systems, higher education institutions, and fire service certification agencies are working together in an unprecedented manner to create a coordinated system for the training and professional development of fire service personnel.

The Simulation Laboratory, housed on the NETC campus, continues to be used effectively in appropriate courses to enable students from the various response disciplines to enhance their knowledge, skills, and confidence in incident management.

A continual challenge for any training or education agency is ensuring that its curriculum and courses are current, relevant, and practical. The NFA has used a curriculum development system designed to ensure that this formidable challenge is met. A significant aspect of course development and revision activities during the past year was the need to revise 93 courses to bring them into compliance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

The NFA continues to use the American Council on Education (ACE) to review its course offerings periodically. This external review ensures that courses have been designed and are being delivered in a manner that meets the learning objectives of each course. Additionally, the NFA continues to use its array of short-term and long-term course evaluation and assessment measures to ensure course learning outcomes.

The BOV has been encouraged by the increasing diversity of the students who take NFA courses. The BOV encourages the NFA to continue to develop and implement recruitment strategies that enhance both the diversity of the student population and the instructor cadre.

As always, the NFA staff has demonstrated the willingness and abilities to use its talents where needed. During the past year these initiatives have taken many forms, including deployments to areas experiencing disasters or major emergency incidents. In addition to

providing valuable operational expertise during these incidents, these deployment experiences have enabled NFA staff to understand more fully the training needs of our Nation's first responders.

The role of the NFA in the development of a national credentialing system for responders to major emergency incidents must be acknowledged. The proposed system, which was presented to, and endorsed by, the BOV, will ensure that those individuals responding to future major incidents have the necessary qualifications in terms of knowledge and skills to operate at the incident scene effectively, efficiently, and safely.

### **An examination of the physical plant of the Academy to determine the adequacy of the Academy facilities.**

The NFA shares the NETC campus in Emmitsburg, Maryland, with the Emergency Management Institute (EMI). NFA staff is housed at this facility, and it is where the NFA resident classes are delivered.

While proactive strategies are being developed to further leverage the limited facilities, there is a demonstrated need to expand the current facilities in terms of classroom and dormitory space. Given the importance of the networking that students do with their counterparts from around the Nation, the entire facility, not just the classrooms, contributes to valuable learning experiences. Here, first responders from across the Nation prepare together for response to future incidents where they may find themselves working with responders from around the Nation.

The NETC facilities are, thus, integral resources to the successful achievement of the NFA mission of preparing our Nation's first responders.

In recent years, those responsible for the NETC campus facilities have demonstrated remarkable stewardship in addressing the challenges of deferred maintenance, both in terms of tracking needed maintenance to maintain the capabilities of the facility to support the present and future programmatic offerings of the NFA, and in ensuring that necessary maintenance is performed. This has been accomplished effectively and efficiently, with rather limited resources.

Those responsible for facilities have been steadfast in their attempts to ensure that the NETC has the necessary infrastructure to provide proper support to the present and future delivery of courses. An essential element of this infrastructure has been the enhancements of technology,

both in educational and administrative support systems. Additional technology enhancements are essential as the NFA continues to adjust its traditional course delivery methodologies to meet the needs of our Nation's first responders, their departments, and their communities more effectively and efficiently.

### **An examination of the funding levels for Academy programs.**

The NFA continues to demonstrate remarkable stewardship in the use of the limited funding that it receives. Adequate funding must be provided to support the traditional and enhanced mission of the NFA: preparing our Nation's first responders for response to major incidents, including acts of terrorism.

Adequate funding is required for both the development and the delivery of courses. The provision of this funding is necessary to enable the NFA to continue to deliver courses that meet the present and future training needs of our Nation's first responders in a dynamic and changing world.

Additional funding is necessary to ensure that appropriate new courses are developed and existing courses are revised. The direction and control of this funding for curriculum development should be within the NFA.

Current economic realities associated with the increased costs of transportation for resident students have presented significant budgetary and operational challenges. The provision of additional funding for student stipends is mission-critical.

In closing, the BOV commends the NFA staff for the dedication and passion that it brings to its work. The level of commitment of these individuals and their colleagues within the other USFA branches that they work closely with is a clear demonstration of stewardship and has enabled the NFA to fulfill its integral role within the Department of Homeland Security successfully.

The BOV also acknowledges the visionary leadership provided by Mr. R. David Paulison, U.S. Fire Administrator; Mr. Charlie Dickinson, Deputy U.S. Fire Administrator; Dr. Denis Onieal, NFA Superintendent; and Dr. Kirby Kiefer, NFA Deputy Superintendent, and the role that they each play in providing the direction and empowerment that enable an outstanding staff to exceed stakeholder expectations in fulfilling the NFA training mission.

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